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THE MARTINEAU STYLE

IN his annual report to the Congregation of Hope Street Chapel, Liverpool, in the autumn of 1837, James Martineau included a paragraph which reveals what Dr. Griffin has called "the Martineau style on a mundane topic".

"The approach of the winter season reminds one that a store of patience must be laid in to endure the annual complaints, with which it is im-

possible not to sympathize, of the severe climate of the chapel, an evil which I am convinced is increased by the present fireplaces which operate merely as so many cold blast engines and whose chimneys carry off more than all the warmth the fires create. The chapel would be more comfortable if not a shovel of coals were ever burnt. I would not have said anything on this matter had not my attention been called to it by the remark that only a congregation of arctic bears could worship comfortably in our chapel at Christmas. If our religion is as cold as our enemies say, we should find it most refreshing when dispersed in a warm atmosphere."

LAYING UP PATIENCE

A HUNDRED years have witnessed great advances in our methods of heating churches, but a great many centuries will have to pass before we shall have outgrown the need for laying in "a store of patience to endure the annual complaints" which germinate and flourish with perennial vitality wherever church folk gather. Even on the matter of the proper heating of the church building on Sunday morning, the habit of complaining has not altogether disappeared. Any sexton, if you can catch him in an expansive mood, will tell you that the temperature of the church is seldom satisfactory to every

person in the congregation. As a practical matter, what he has to learn is the art of balancing one set of criticisms against another, and figuring out for himself the net result. On the same day he may be told that the church was both too hot and too cold, both stuffy and draughty, and simultaneously fit only for arctic bears and the inhabitants of Bali. I have often stood in admiring amazement before the good temper of church janitors, and wondered where in the world they got the patience they almost always display. Perhaps they follow the policy hinted at by the great Dr. Martineau, and take advantage of the long summer vacation, which most of our churches provide, to lay in a store of patience. If so, I wish they would tell the rest of us just how they do it.

THE MOST NECESSARY VIRTUE

BEING myself a parson, I am thinking particularly of the need for a large supply of patience which every parish minister recognizes when he thinks of a new year of church work ahead of him. On the whole, I consider it the most necessary of all the virtues for a minister. To be sure, he needs courage, and a stern sense of intellectual honesty, and a heart which prompts him to generous kindness; but each of these virtues—and all of them together—can be made helpless and useless by an impatient spirit. The

prophet in the wilderness has little need for patience; but when a parish minister speaks the prophetic word from his own pulpit he cannot afford to fail in patient understanding of "the people's liberty". What a parish minister accomplishes consists largely in what he can persuade other people to do, and while patience is not necessary for a soloist it is absolutely indispensable for the conductor of an orchestra.

Of course, the problem is complicated by the fact that the qualities which make a man successful in the more public aspects of a minister's work are apt to make him the "temperamental" sort of person. The preacher is a creative artist, and he seldom starts with a disposition that is placid and "easy to get along with". The testimony of ministers' wives on this point would be valuable—not unanimous, I imagine, but on the whole conclusive. One has to remember that only the angels combine those qualities and virtues that are mutually exclusive and contradictory on the human level; and when one has the stuff out of which a creative artist can be made it is a bit unreasonable to expect that it will prove to be also the material out of which a paragon of patience will emerge. Even the miracle-workers of modern chemistry have not yet manufactured swords out of poppy-seeds.

Nevertheless, the plain fact remains that a church is made up of human beings who must find

out how to work together; and a minister who cannot muster up sufficient patience to get along with his people—in spite of their faults and foibles, their whims and prejudices, their frailties and idiosyncracies—will certainly not be doing his main job. And he will also be missing one of the chief satisfactions of the minister's vocation.

GETTING THINGS DONE

CHURCHES differ from all other human institutions in many ways, and churches differ among themselves to a remarkable degree. To get things done in a church, it is first of all necessary to discover in detail just how it differs from other institutions, and then just how it differs from every other church. Only the most careful and painstaking study of the unique characteristics of an individual parish will give the minister the basis for a workable plan of action. He may have ideas that are theoretically the best in the world; he may have plans that would serve admirably to strengthen and enlarge the work of his church; but, until he has patiently observed the actual character of the parish to the point where he really knows it, he will not be able to get his ideas "across" or his plans adopted. Human nature being what it is, the best possible suggestions will fall on to stony ground unless they are presented in exactly the right way.

One element in the right presentation of ideas to a church is the matter of timing. A suggestion that meets prompt rejection in June may receive prompt acceptance in October, just because people are tired at the end of a busy church year and full of zeal at the end of the summer vacation. The minister who keeps a careful eye on the financial condition of his church will not propose a plan that involves raising more money at a time when his board of trustees is worried about meeting the financial obligations already incurred. In a thousand instances, the fate of a suggestion will depend upon the minister's choosing the right moment to offer it; and if it is summarily tossed out the window, the fault is as often with the poor timing of the minister as with the unresponsiveness of his church.

THE OTHER WAY ROUND, TOO

ALL this is equally true of suggestions made by a parish to its minister—especially in the matter of timing. Immediately after the Sunday morning service, for example, when the minister is drained almost dry of nervous and spiritual energy, even a very sensible suggestion is likely to appear to him in a thoroughly distorted perspective. If he remembers it at all—and the chances are definitely in favor of his forgetting even an important message that is delivered to

him at that particular moment—he is likely to remember it with a touch of annoyance that will twist it out of its true proportions. The same suggestion, if it were offered when he had had time to get a bit of rest after the strenuous business of preaching, might well be promptly and gratefully accepted.

TIME TO THINK IT OVER

BOTH minister and people require time to think over any new idea—time to look at it from several different angles, time to adjust their prepossessions and prejudices, time to figure out just what it really means and what it involves. Any important suggestion deserves to be considered at leisure, and any attempt to hurry this process will be fatal. Individuals and churches vary tremendously, of course, in the amount of time required for the proper consideration of a new idea; but they are all alike in resenting an idea that is "sprung" on them. A minister may have given months of thought to an idea, turning it over in his mind until he has convinced himself that he has seen it and tested it from every possible angle; but if he then presents it to his board and expects them to receive it with immediate enthusiasm, he is making a serious blunder. They, too, must have time to "mull it over"; and the sensible minister will propose his idea and let it

wait for a month, or six months, before asking for action upon it. Sometimes, he may have to wait a couple of years, if the idea is a real one.

All this takes patience; and the summer is a grand opportunity to let one's supply of that virtue slowly replenish itself, in preparation for the exacting demands of a new church year.

F. M. E.

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FREDERICK M. ELIOT, *President* PARKER E. MAREAN, *Treasurer*

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